



Open Forum Session; October 09 Conference, Coventry

The following topics were discussed by conference participants:

Importance of Preparation Time

- National press needs six months' lead time for non-news items.
- On-going need to recruit artists
- Time needs to be allowed to assess the value of the event, and then to demonstrate benefits to both artists and audiences. This requires discussions and decisions – can you remain as volunteers on the fees you receive? Would it be advantageous to introduce a membership scheme, and offer talks, exhibitions, training and a web presence? How should the fees be set – high or low? (*Perhaps there needs to be some national advocacy based on a comparison of fees*). Should there be a joining fee?
- Early decisions are needed so that administration and policies are in place before artists make their commitment to the event, and meet their deadline for registration.
- Distribution of brochures needs to take account of opportunities for bulk or piggy-back distribution such as farmers' markets and through schools' lists.
- Being business-like validates the event and gives it and its participants credibility in the perception of funders, sponsors and audiences.

Inspiring Participation in Artists' Networks

Elements that go towards making a successful local network:

- Promise of a well-run website with benefits beyond the open studios event (e.g. gallery space / webpage and regular bulletins)
- Good leadership and facilitation to overcome personality problems that can arise through self-selection.
- Harnessing the energies, enthusiasms, aspirations and ambitions of recent graduates. They may be feeling 'out on a limb', isolated, and looking for the next steps in their career path. Open studios events could provide opportunities for installations and profiling of conceptual work
- Profiling example of other successful networks
 - WASPS teamed-up with Spring Fling in Dumfries & Galloway to provide a bursary for emerging artists to create installations/ non-gallery work, therefore introducing new artforms to audiences
 - Stroud makes the Open Studios event part of a wider festival
 - other events obtain sponsorship for open exhibitions, plus an open competition for signposting events which resulted, for example, in a portable cabinet of curiosities

- Individuals / personalities / charisma
- Orbit around particular spaces / facilities: e.g., a 'pop-up gallery' or a school of art
- Engage artist-facilitators to stimulate activities and projects, and to inspire individuals
- Provide opportunities for artists to organise their own social events
- Find challenges to tackle, and galvanise reaction / response from artists
- Provide training sessions (e.g. media day – media relations) and professional development events delivered by successful studio groups
- Define aims and objectives, terms & conditions; triangulate problems through three-way conversations
- Define the offer, and incorporate means of ensuring that responsibility for action and development is shared.

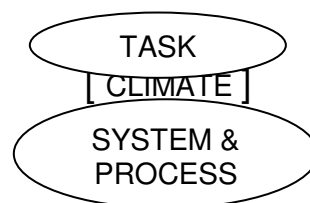
Change & Development

The role of an organisation is to both support and challenge its membership. Anecdotally, the Pareto Principle is applied, where 20% of the membership is actively involved, leaving 80% which wants everything done for them.

The relationships between voluntary committees and paid administrators relies on solid consultation and communication, good decision-making mechanisms and commitment to action.

Making the case for change needs to take account of:

- The involvement of funders and their requirements
- Ensuring that the organisation is fit for purpose through its
 - Structure
 - Finance
 - Behaviour
 - Future-proofing
- The changing nature of artists' organisations, and the need to keep pace with societal changes.
- Historical models that manage loss of participants and induction of new members with policies of progression, exit and succession.
- Selection versus come-one-come-all
- The Organisational Bun:



Streamlining

A database-driven system can streamline the administrative and publishing processes of an event, with a content management system (CMS) format for the website. This enables artists to input, and be responsible for, their own datasets, and means that a current database can be output as

- Guidebook
- Brochures
- Direct brochure design (with or without designer)
- Renewal notices – for subscriptions
- archiving.

However, there will probably always be some artists who will be resistant to this, and databases still need regular 'housekeeping' to ensure that they are current.

Given that market research reveals that the main audience for events consists of women over the age of 40, and older people generally, there is still a need for paper/material-based promotional and marketing material. This is reinforced by the need for good quality, high-definition image reproduction, which is currently only guaranteed through print media. However, to streamline these costs, print prices need to be constantly monitored. Mailed-out print should include an 'if undelivered, return to' address stamped on the envelope, so that these entries in mailing lists can be manually deleted.

Marketing

The group posed a number of questions, some of which were answered in part through general discussion, and others that could be covered in future sessions. The questions were:

- 1. What's effective?**
 - local radio advertising and interviews
 - website (although it doesn't reach everybody)
 - social network opportunities such as Facebook, Twitter & YouTube videos
 - adverts in lifestyle magazines – a 'friends' organisation (considered to be hard work for little return by those organisations that have tried it)
- 2. What's marketing?**
- 3. Who's marketing what to whom?**
- 4. Who goes to events – what are the demographics?**
 - women over 40.
- 5. How to get feedback about effective marketing?**
- 6. What's the aim?**
 - to get people in and sell to them.
- 7. How to recruit artists?**
 - encourage new work
- 8. How to help artists that struggle to get visitors?**
 - encourage artists to market themselves; equip them with handbooks, a guidebook, a website.
 - provide a mentoring scheme and use friends, peers, other artists and colleagues, cluster-groups and buddy systems

Compiled by J Cadie, October 2009